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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION ANNOUNCES END TO "HOT SPRING"
CAMPAIGN AT LACKLUSTER RALLY

[11.](#) (U) Sensitive But Unclassified -- Please treat accordingly.

SUMMARY

[12.](#) (SBU) Leaders of the Armenian opposition Justice bloc and National Accord Party officially announced June 16 the end of the much-touted "hot spring" anti-Kocharian campaign. While some opposition leaders hinted during their "final rally--for now" on June 16 that they remain uncompromising in their demand for Kocharian's resignation, most observers and sources within the opposition agree that the announcement was an admission of defeat. It remains unclear from opposition statements whether or not opposition MPs (who have been boycotting parliament since March 2004) will return to parliament now that the rallies appear to have lost steam. End summary.

OPPOSITION ENDS ITS SPRING CAMPAIGN

[13.](#) (U) During a lackluster June 16 rally, Justice bloc leaders announced that they would halt their "hot spring" anti-Kocharian campaign indefinitely. Without much elaboration, they said that the "first stage" of their plan to oust Kocharian had not gone as planned and that they would think of "new methods of political struggle" for the future. National Accord Party Chairman Artashes Geghamian added that the decision to halt opposition efforts took into consideration several "external factors" including developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the release of an upcoming Council of Europe report on Armenia. In contrast to their earlier statements on the opposition's resolve to continue its boycott of parliament, opposition leaders' speeches were non-committal on the issue during the June 16 rally.

CITY PRE-APPROVES RALLY, RECEIVES UNEXPECTED REACTION

[14.](#) (SBU) Unlike most of the previous opposition rallies in downtown Yerevan this spring, the mayor's office approved the June 16 event as part of new regulations on political rallies and manifestations. Opposition leaders, some of whom were the sharpest critics of the city's unwillingness to sanction earlier rallies, decried the Mayor's move as "insulting" and designed to put Kocharian and the GOAM in a more democratic, benevolent light and to defuse anti-Kocharian sentiment among opposition supporters. One opposition newspaper opined that the rally's approval was timed closely to coincide with the visit of a Council of Europe fact-finding team.

[15.](#) (SBU) Attendance at the June 16 rally was limited. Generous estimates put the number of protesters at

[12000.](#) Observers reported that the majority of attendees left the rally even before the culminating speech by People's Party Chairman Stepan Demirchian. (Note: Some opposition members reported frustration that a televised soccer match was heavy competition for the event and drew the crowd away before Demirchian could take the podium. End note.)

COMMENT

[16.](#) (SBU) While the new opposition alliance between Demirchian and Geghamian lasted through the spring series of rallies and protests, there is little evidence to suggest that they plan future collaboration on party platforms or as part of a unified front within parliament. The decision of opposition MPs to return

to parliament will be an important barometer of cohesion among opposition parties. Geghamian has utilized his place in parliament to enhance his public profile in the past. Now that opposition rallies have lost steam and faded from the front pages, it is possible that he, or other opposition MPs, will move back into parliament to keep their parties in the public eye. End comment.
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